

The successful community bike share



How Carmel, Indiana, launched and grew
an exemplary bike-sharing program



A photograph of a man riding a bicycle on a city street, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The man is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there are multi-story buildings and a street lamp.

**"I love Zagster...
It's been a great product for us."**

Carmel Mayor Jim Brainard

Bike-sharing programs are on the rise in America— **and for good reason.**

They offer ample economic and public health benefits to communities. And with car culture waning, Americans are increasingly seeing biking as a practical, everyday mode of transportation.

However, until recently, the complexity and cost of running a successful bike share confined most systems to major metropolitan markets. So while high-density cities like New York and Boston debuted vaunted programs, smaller municipalities were left behind.

That's no longer the case. Thanks to innovative updates to the traditional

bike-sharing model, many smaller communities are now also enjoying all the benefits that bike shares have to offer.

This case study documents how Zagster helped one of those communities, **Carmel, Indiana**, achieve its longtime goal of building — and growing — a successful bike share program.

A photograph of two women standing on a paved path, each with a bicycle. The woman on the left is wearing a light-colored jacket and a backpack, while the woman on the right is wearing a dark jacket. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background is a blurred path with trees. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

The inspiration

“A bike share is one of many components to make a city like ours work well.”

- Carmel Mayor Jim Brainard

Carmel has long been considered one of America’s best places to live. (In 2012, the city took top honors in *Money* magazine’s annual ranking.) In part, that renown has come thanks to initiatives intended to counter sprawl and increase walkability — goals that made urban cycling a natural consideration.

“We have designed cities over the last 60 to 70 years where people aren’t required to walk or get any exercise on a daily basis,” says Carmel Mayor Jim Brainard. “We’re trying to change that in this city [by] going back to the way we designed cities for centuries before the car came along. Bike transportation was a big part of that.”

Progressive transportation planning created multi-use paths and laid a solid

cycling foundation. And with direct access to the Monon Trail — a greenway that runs into neighboring Indianapolis — Carmel had a natural bike corridor waiting to be tapped.

The launch of bike shares in Paris (2007) and Washington, D.C., (2010) piqued Carmel’s interest in doing something similar. Yet exploration into available bike-sharing models led Carmel to a dispiriting conclusion: Bike sharing was simply too expensive and unwieldy for a city of Carmel’s size.

Then, in 2014, Indianapolis announced its Pacers bike-sharing system, and Carmel saw an opportunity. “We dusted off our old plans,” says David Littlejohn, Carmel’s alternative transportation coordinator.



Hills to climb

Launching a bike share is not without its challenges. And in Carmel, those challenges fell into two main categories.

Logistical obstacles


Carmel hoped to partner with Indianapolis' program, but the private operator, BCycle, was unable to accommodate the community's needs. BCycle doubted a suburban extension would see enough use. And though the company would have administered both programs, quirks in the system model made integration between the two neighbors unworkable.

Density was also a major sticking point. Though Carmel strove to be more compact than the average American suburb, it still lacked the density big-city bike-sharing models demanded. Littlejohn remembers one study that insisted docking kiosks be built every 300 meters or so, **"which was not going to be possible here in Carmel."**

Financial obstacles

Traditional bike-sharing models require significant investments of time, money, and resources up front. Programs typically call for hefty capital investments from the city or sponsors in advance, with expansions likewise done in big, expensive chunks — an onerous ask for a city of any size.

Plus, even if had Carmel moved ahead with a Pacers extension, it still would have had to establish, fund, and operate its program independently. Meaning, the city would have been stuck paying costly upkeep on a swiftly depreciating asset.



How Zagster got Carmel rolling

“It seemed like the Zagster model would fit right in with what Carmel is trying to implement here in the city for our community members.”

- David Littlejohn, Carmel’s alternative transportation coordinator

Stumped yet determined, Carmel reached out to Zagster — and found the solution it needed.

Unlike other providers, Zagster included in a single contract all the equipment and service — everything from hardware and software, to maintenance and marketing — necessary to launch and grow a bike share.

“The city spends very little on it because of the structure that Zagster has provided,” Mayor Brainard says.

The unique contract format also meant that while Zagster would run

the program, Carmel would maintain complete control. That “made it easier for us to be able to initiate the program and make sure that it’s being run the way that the city thinks that it needs to be run,” Littlejohn says.

Zagster also kept operational costs low because the company handled all the post-launch nitty-gritty. And because Zagster has a shared interest in sustaining and growing the system, that eases the financial burden on Carmel going forward.

“We were probably going to have to hire a new employee to be able to take on all of that maintenance and re-balance. The fact that [Zagster] provides it saves us the new employee that we would have had to hire just to run the program.”
- David Littlejohn, alternative transportation coordinator

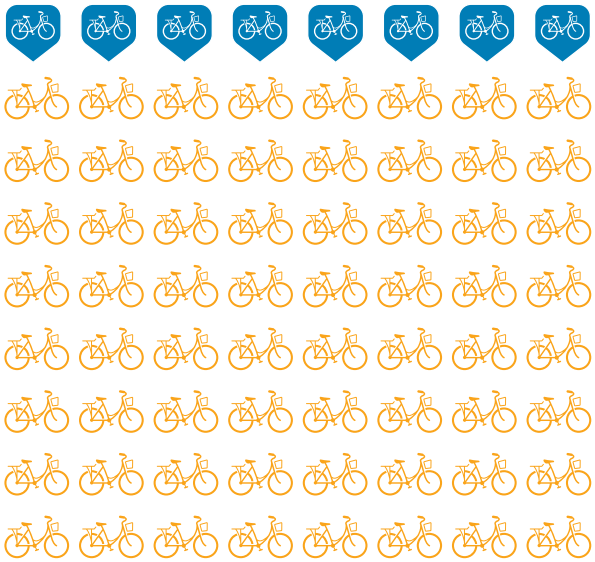
Then there were the long-held concerns about density. Here, again, Zagster offered a viable solution.

Unlike traditional programs whose kiosks require riders to constantly swap bikes mid-ride, Zagster allows users to lock up anywhere along the way. By reducing the need for extra stations to support short stops, Zagster enabled Carmel to start small before building out. The city originally identified 12 potential station locations, but opted to start with just two docks and 22 bikes. “Then we started to grow, knowing that we had some partners who wanted to come on board but that we’d made that first investment,” Littlejohn says.

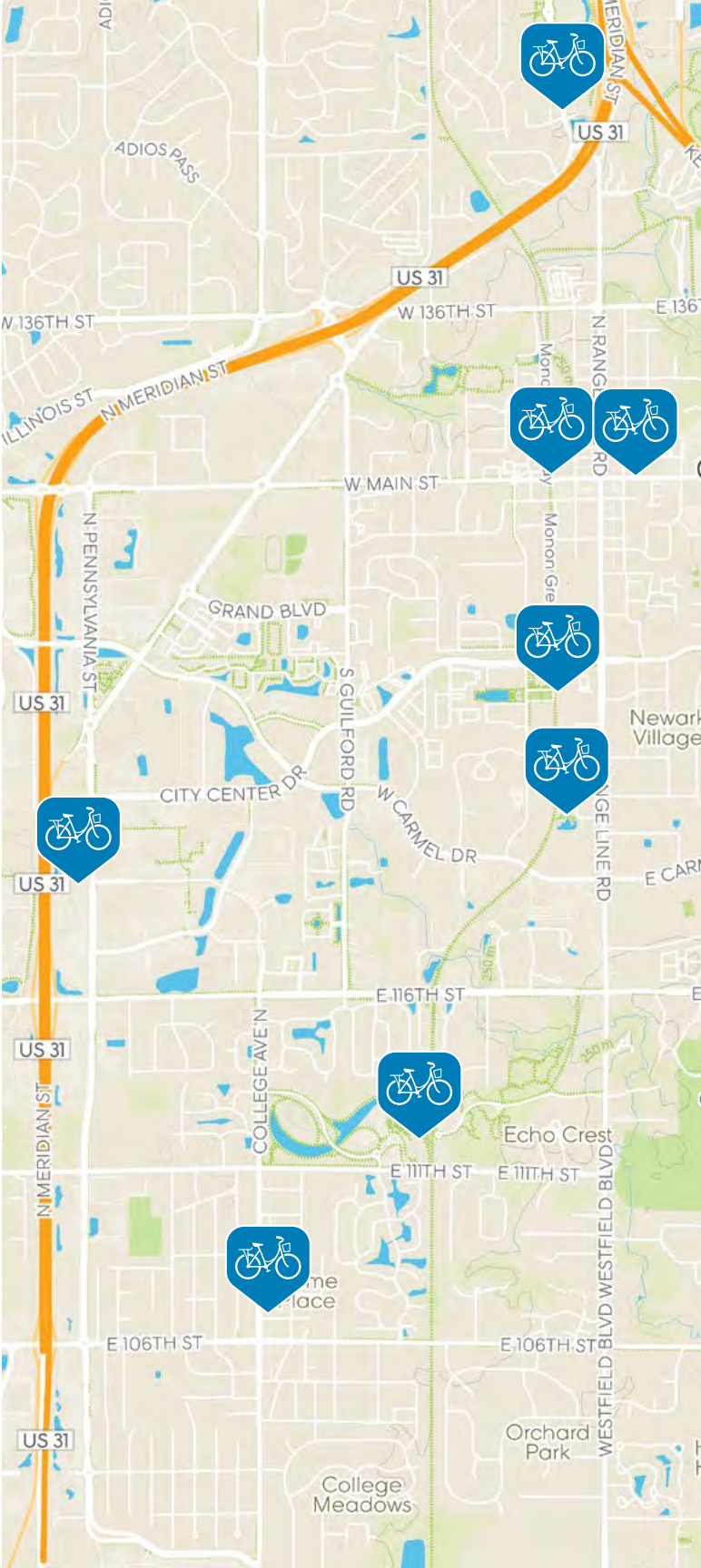
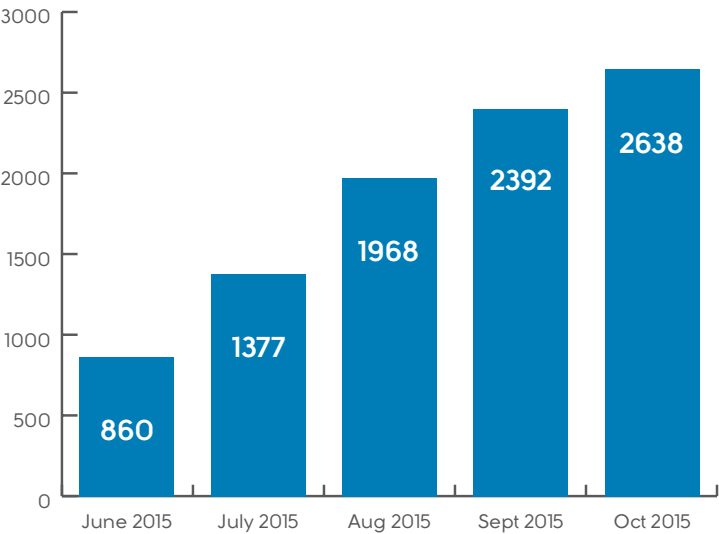
Zagster’s model also made scalability easy because it allowed for cross-compatibility between new stations — and other systems — in and outside Carmel. Businesses can work directly with Zagster and Carmel to sponsor stations or implement bike-share programs that link to the broader network. “Because of the way that you work, and the way that your infrastructure is, it would be very easy for programs to co-relate,” Littlejohn says.

The swift turnaround from conception to completion was a nice bonus. Carmel began communicating with Zagster in late 2014; the city’s program launched in April the following year.

8 stations, 64 bikes



total rides



The background of the page is a collage of three images, all with a blue overlay. The top-left image shows five women standing next to their bicycles on a paved path. The top-right image shows a Zagster bike rack filled with bicycles, with a sign that says 'Zagster need a bike? borrow one'. The bottom image shows three people riding triathlon bikes on a paved path.

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On its first birthday, Carmel's bike share is a resounding success. The program bolstered the city's image, making it a more appealing place to work, live, or just spend an afternoon. "It's made it a more fun place to visit," Mayor Brainard says. "It's made it a better place for millennials that don't want to necessarily own a car and want to be able to have alternative transportation options. **It's just made it more fun for our residents.**"

In making Carmel a more attractive destination, "Zagster has helped our economy in many ways," Mayor Brainard says. City officials say they've seen considerable usage in business areas, and data shows a high percentage of

riders coming from miles away, or out of state.

Then there are the health benefits. Again, Mayor Brainard: "You don't know how many 70- and 80-year-olds I've talked to who say, 'You know, I was overweight, and I'm getting out every day now on the trail, either walking or riding the bike, riding Zagster ... It really has made the community healthier.'"

All of which is to say: Carmel was already a first-rate U.S. city; Zagster helped make it even better.

"It's all about competition. It's about city design. It's about what we do with what we have — and Zagster is a part of that puzzle."

- Mayor Jim Brainard



the road ahead

Thrilled with the early returns, Carmel is looking to further expand its bike-sharing program. Here, too, Zagster is empowering the city's efforts.

Revenue from bike sharing "will be re-invested in the program," Littlejohn says, for future amenities and outreach. Partnerships with local agencies and businesses will also reduce the cost to taxpayers while allowing the system to grow organically. "Not only can you grow it incrementally, but you can grow it incrementally with partners," Brainard says.

Moreover, because Carmel isn't on the hook for depreciating infrastructure, the city can easily upgrade to the latest and greatest technology. "In two years, who knows what could be developed," Littlejohn says. "And we will have access to that new technology and not have to just rely on the stuff that we bought years ago."

And recall the roadblocks Carmel encountered when trying to partner with Indianapolis' bike share? That's

not a problem with Zagster. Carmel's neighboring town of Westfield is preparing to roll out a compatible Zagster program in spring 2016.

Bike Shares for Everyone

Carmel is a prime example of how smaller cities can overcome inherent logistical and financial constraints to launch exemplary bike-sharing systems. When other models proved too cumbersome and expensive, Zagster provided a tailored, scalable, and cost-effective solution perfectly suited to Carmel's needs.

So what would Mayor Brainard say to other elected officials considering bike shares in other communities? **"I would encourage them to get a bike-share program," he says. "It's healthy for the community, it creates a sense of community — and it's just fun."**



"Everything we do to raise the quality of life, including creating a bike share with a great company like Zagster, helps make this a more competitive place.
A better place."

Mayor Jim Brainard



better
on a
bike.

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